



# honoring 15 years of the 21st century community learning centers program

A Polity-Centered Analysis

by Sarah Fierberg Phillips

In 1994, Senators Jim Jeffords (R-VT) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Representatives Steve Gunderson (R-WI) and William Goodling (R-PA) sponsored the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Act (S.1990, 1994a; H.R.3734, 1994b) in order to “open up schools for broader use by their communities.” Part of the full-service schools *zeitgeist*, the act never passed independently. However, it was incorporated into the Improving

end school programs; and parenting skills programs. The first grants were awarded in 1995.

Over the past 15 years, the 21st CCLC program has grown and changed. Today, it is the largest federal funding stream for afterschool programming, funneling \$1.17 billion directly to states to support “the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The 21st CCLC program’s 15th anniversary is a suitable time to review its political history. As debates surrounding the next reauthorization of the

America’s Schools Act of 1994, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act. In this act, Congress appropriated \$750,000 for the 21st Century Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, requiring that grants be made for “projects that benefit the educational, health, social service, cultural and recreational needs of a rural or inner city community.” Funds could be used for a wide array of purposes including literacy education; integrated education, health, social service, recreational, or cultural programs; summer and week-

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Elementary and Secondary Education Act commence, afterschool advocates can benefit from a deeper understanding of how this country's seminal afterschool program has been expanded and maintained. Yet my literature search revealed no prior scholarship that uses political theory to analyze the history of the 21st CCLC program.<sup>1</sup> Emphasizing the intersection of policy and politics, this paper uses Theda Skocpol's polity-centered approach (1992) to analyze two key moments in the history of the 21st CCLC program:

1998, when the program's budget grew from \$40 million to \$200 million, and 2003, when President Bush attempted to cut the program's budget from \$1 billion to \$400 million. A thorough understanding of this history can help afterschool advocates successfully respond to President Obama's recent proposal to dramatically change the 21st CCLC program once again.

### **The Polity-Centered Approach**

According to Skocpol, efforts to understand the "origins and transformations of national systems of social provision" must focus on the state of the *polity*, a term that refers to the political organizations and institutions of a society. In the U.S., the polity includes the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government as well as political parties and extra-governmental interest groups. Skocpol argues that policy is initiated or transformed when congruence exists between the goals and capacities of key political actors such as politicians, bureaucrats, political parties, and interest groups. However, socioeconomic relations, cultural patterns, and previously established social policies influence this congruence, in part, by creating "group political orientations" (Skocpol, 1992, p. 41).

This paper uses Skocpol's polity-centered approach to explain why efforts to change the 21st CCLC program were successful in 1998 and unsuccessful in 2003. It explores the way that changing work patterns and growing interest in positive youth development helped create broad support for afterschool during the 1990s. It pays particular attention to the congruence among the interests and abilities of philanthropists, U.S. Department of Education (US DOE) leaders, and the White House during the late 1990s, as well as between Congressional

leaders and afterschool advocates during 2003. It discusses changes to the balance of power between the Democrats and Republicans during both time periods and explores the way that the expansion of the 21st CCLC program in 1998 and subsequent changes worked to frustrate the President's efforts in 2003. This paper concludes by reviewing recent controversy surrounding President Obama's proposed changes to the 21st CCLC program, suggesting that afterschool advocates consider

the President's efforts in light of history and draw on the past to shape their response.

### **The Clinton Era**

Changing work patterns, a booming economy, and a growing youth development field played a critical role in turning a small Congressional program aimed at opening up schools to their communities into a massive Presidential program emphasizing afterschool childcare. Between the 1970s and 1990s, U.S. work patterns changed dramatically. The length of the work week expanded; by 1998 the U.S. had more workers putting in 50 hours

of work per week than nearly any other country (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998). During this period, women's labor force participation also shifted. Whereas slightly more than 40 percent of women 16 years and older were working outside the home in 1976, approximately 55 percent were working outside the home in 1993 (Rones, Ilg, & Gardner, 1997). Moreover, 1996's welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act, ended welfare entitlements and pushed welfare recipients into the labor force. Coupled with an unprecedented economic boom, the welfare caseload fell from over 12 million to about 5 million between 1996 and 2002 (Currie, 2006).

These trends meant that parents needed afterschool childcare more than ever before. At the same time, researchers and youth workers radically altered their understanding of effective youth programming. Prior to the late 1980s, research on young people operated primarily within a deficit perspective, in which young people were commonly constructed as "problems" to be "fixed." As a result, youth programs typically emphasized prevention or treatment of specific risk factors such as substance abuse or violence. As researchers began focusing on resil-

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ience and positive youth development, they re-oriented the field toward the supports and experiences young people need to develop the personal characteristics and habits that will enable them to grow up healthy and strong (Lerner, 2005). Scholars and practitioners working from this perspective tend to argue that community-based programs can encourage positive youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2005).

In this context, interest in after-school and out-of-school time programming grew. By the mid-1990s, several large foundations, including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation, and the Open Society Institute, began championing after-school initiatives. The Mott Foundation, in particular, saw an opportunity "to take afterschool programs and school-community partnerships to scale by increasing federal funding" (Hurst & Chung, 2005).

Mott's interests were quite similar to those of U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley. Supported by his longtime advisor Terry Peterson, Secretary Riley strongly believed in partnerships as a vehicle to advance educational policy (Sack, 2000). In 1997, Peterson approached Mott Foundation President Bill White. As Peterson recollected:

After knowing Bill about one minute, I innocently asked...if Mott would be willing to invest a couple million dollars in technical assistance and training for afterschool programs if we were able to get our Administration and Congress to appropriate a couple hundred million dollars for the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs.... Bill said, "yes" on the spot. (Peterson, 2004, p. 3)

With Mott's support secured, Riley and Peterson had little difficulty convincing President Clinton to advocate expansion of the 21st CCLC program, which was originally enacted in 1994. Both the President and the First Lady strongly supported childcare. In his initial welfare reform proposal, the President advocated expanding childcare support for former welfare recipients and vetoed Congress' first welfare reform legislation partly because it did not offer sufficient funding for childcare (Conlan, 1998). In 1997, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton organized a White House Conference on Child Care because, as one observer opined, she wanted to secure her legacy after being widely criticized for her role

in the President's failed healthcare reform efforts (Tumulty & Blackman, 1997). At the conference, the President cited changing work patterns to argue that "nothing is more important...than finding child care that is affordable, accessible, and safe" (Clinton, October 23, 1997).

In January 1998, the President announced his commitment to a fivefold expansion of 21st CCLC, declaring that he would request \$200 million for the program in his budget for the next five years and highlighting the partnership Riley had cemented with the Mott Foundation (US DOE, 1998). Clinton framed his efforts in terms of childcare and delinquency prevention, saying, "I am proposing the expansion of before and after school programs to help some 500,000 children say no to drugs and alcohol and crime, and yes to reading, soccer, computers, and a brighter future for themselves" (US DOE, 1998). In a later speech, he reiterated that his proposal was part of a broader effort to expand quality, affordable childcare (Clinton, June 17, 1998).

President Clinton's efforts to improve childcare were made possible, in part, by a policy environment ripe for enhanced public spending. In 1998, after nearly six years of unprecedented economic growth, President Clinton was able to report the first federal budget surplus since 1969. In this context, the President had room to advocate spending increases.

While the Monica Lewinsky crisis stalled progress on much of the President's agenda throughout 1998, the President's call to increase funding for the 21st CCLC program was generally supported by Congress. In the House of Representatives, for example, Representatives Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Barbara Kennelly (D-CT) introduced separate pieces of legislation calling for increased funding for the 21st CCLC program. Slaughter's bill had 18 co-sponsors, all but one of whom were Democrats (America Afterschool Act, 1998). House Republicans, at the time the Congressional majority, supported a modest increase in the budget, but the \$60 million they attempted to appropriate fell far short of the \$200 million the President requested (Kennedy, 1998).

In the end, Democrats rolled President Clinton's proposal for expanding the 21st CCLC budget into an omnibus appropriations bill, which they passed in late October despite strong opposition from Republicans (Omnibus Appropriations Conference Report, 1998). In

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part, this success was due to changes within the Republican Party in 1997–1998. While Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA) oversaw strong party unity during his first few years as speaker, his influence waned after the Republican showdown with President Clinton over the budget in 1996 (Conlan, 1998). After being reprimanded by the House in January 1997 for ethics violations, Gingrich nearly lost his job as speaker in a July coup (Jenkins, 1997; Rogers & Kuntz, 1997). More importantly, efforts by Gingrich and the Republican Party to remove President Clinton from office over the Lewinsky matter failed. The American public remained strongly supportive of President Clinton throughout the crisis, and an overwhelming majority did not support his impeachment (Fischle, 2000). By the time Congress began debating the omnibus appropriations act, the Republican Party was in disarray and in no position to defeat Democratic efforts.

Thus, President Clinton's five-fold expansion of the 21st CCLC program was voted into law in late October 1998, marking a major expansion of the federal government's support for afterschool programs (Omnibus Appropriations Conference Report, 1998). While social, economic, and educational developments helped set the stage for this tremendous growth, strong alignment among the ideas and interests of the Mott Foundation, the Secretary of Education, and the President and First Lady coincided with Republican disarray to propel the program's expansion through Congress.

### The Bush Era

Under President Clinton, the 21st CCLC program grew from a relatively minor program to a major federal investment in afterschool programming. Clinton's successor, President George W. Bush, initially showed great interest in the program as well. In his 2001 budget, for example, President Bush proposed increasing the 21st CCLC budget to \$1 billion (US DOE, 2008). However, the President seemed to be less interested in enhancing federal childcare support than in promoting education reform. An uncommon degree of bipartisan collaboration, broad Congressional support, and existing state

models helped advance the President's education priorities, enshrining them in No Child Left Behind, the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Finn & Hess, 2004). During the reauthorization process, the 21st CCLC program was significantly altered. Instead of being administered by the federal government, the program was devolved to the states and reorganized to emphasize "remedial education, math and science classes, tutoring and mentoring"—

a change that fit squarely with the President's interest in test scores and accountability (Finn & Hess, 2004; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

In February 2003, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., a highly regarded policy research organization, released the first year of a multiyear analysis of the 21st CCLC program commissioned by the US DOE (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). Initiated under President Clinton, the study's preliminary findings suggested that the 21st CCLC program had no impact on the percentage of children caring for themselves during afterschool hours and no positive effect on students' behavior (Dynarski et al., 2002). Subsequent phases of the study also found lit-

tle academic benefit, although the authors concluded that the program had led to increased parental involvement, generated small improvements in math scores, and improved African-American and Hispanic students' grades and school attendance (*Investment in after-school programs*, 2003).

In response, President Bush recommended a 40 percent budget cut for the 21st CCLC program. In testimony before a subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, William Hansen, Deputy Secretary of Education, framed the President's decision in rational terms that emphasized the President's interest in accountability. In light of Mathematica's report, Hansen explained, the President decided to "spend those resources on proven effective programs...representing our priorities"—namely, Title I and special education (*Investment in after-school programs*, 2003).

It is not surprising that a President whose entire education policy was based on high-stakes testing and ac-

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countability withdrew support for what he believed was an ineffective education program. However, the President's efforts also seemed to be partly shaped by socioeconomic conditions. Between 2001 and 2003, President Bush pushed significant tax cuts through Congress. In the wake of 9/11, the President also greatly increased federal spending. With less revenue and increased expenditures, the deficit grew and the President was forced to cut spending on social programs.

However, President Bush was unable to push his 21st CCLC budget cut through Congress. The same groups that catalyzed President Clinton's expansion of the 21st CCLC program stymied his efforts. Recognizing the need for ongoing organizing to protect and expand on their 1999 budgetary victory, the Mott Foundation and US DOE joined forces with the J.C. Penney Company, the Open Society Institute, the Entertainment Industry Foundation, and the Creative Artists Agency Foundation in September 1999. In 2000, the group established the Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to promoting "after-school for all" (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.).

The Afterschool Alliance played a key role in defeating President Bush's proposal, but, by this time, its efforts were part of a much larger movement. A survey by the National Association of Elementary School Principals found that 67 percent of principals said that their schools offered optional afterschool programs (Noam, Miller, & Barry, 2002). The students and families served by these programs, the staff they employed, and the local and state intermediaries and foundations dedicated to their success rallied to protect their interests. The Afterschool Alliance published survey data showing that "nine in ten Americans think afterschool programs are important" and "three in four voters...are concerned about President Bush's commitment to leave no child behind when they are informed of his 2003 proposal to cut federal funding for afterschool programs" (Afterschool Alliance, December 2003, p. 2). In addition, the Alliance published a report noting that current funding levels were insufficient to meet the demand for 21st CCLC programs (Afterschool Alliance, March 2003). In March, the organization co-sponsored a briefing on Capitol Hill with a bipartisan group of senators including Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Christopher Dodd (D-CT), John Ensign (R-NV), Ted Kennedy (D-

MA), and Gordon Smith (R-OR). During this briefing, advocates introduced legislators to leading afterschool programs and discussed the large body of research contradicting Mathematica's report (Afterschool Alliance, April 21, 2003).

Legislators seemed predisposed to support the positions of the afterschool community. The 21st CCLC program had been relatively popular with legislators since 1998, and President Bush's efforts to devolve funding to the states made it more so. Legislators were unwilling to cut a program that generated revenue for their communities, particularly because many of these communities had been forced to cut programs for children as a result of state budget crises that stemmed from the President's tax cuts (OMB Watch, 2003).

Furthermore, by 2003, the bipartisan coalition supporting No Child Left Behind had dissipated (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006), and the President's popularity was waning (BBC News, n.d.). Thus, even

Republicans were willing to challenge the President's proposal to cut the 21st CCLC budget. On May 13, 2003, the Senate Appropriations subcommittee responsible for education held a special hearing on the President's proposed budget cuts. Two U.S. DOE staffers represented the Administration's position, while the Afterschool Alliance; the mayor of New Haven, Connecticut; the chief of police of Knoxville, Iowa; and two students represented the afterschool community. The hearing transcript suggests that afterschool advocates packed the room (*Investment in after-school programs*, 2003).

During the hearing, the committee chair, Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), vigorously cross-examined staffers. At one point he chastised US DOE Deputy Secretary Hansen for his efforts to ascertain Congressional intent. "Speak for yourself; do not speak for Congress," he declared (*Investment in after-school programs*, 2003, p. 7). Similarly, after forcing the director of US DOE's Institute of Education Sciences to acknowledge some of the benefits found by Mathematica, Specter declared:

And that is why, frankly, I am surprised that, when your studies are incomplete, you come in and want to reduce it from \$933 million to \$600 million. Your last answer articulates the difficulty of making an evaluation. And the evaluation is incomplete. (*Investment in after-school programs*, 2003, p. 9)

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Though he badgered US DOE staffers, Senator Specter asked no questions of the 21st CCLC advocates who testified. Further, in his final statement, after thanking the afterschool advocates for their work, Specter declared, “I think we have heard very, very impressive testimony. You have very, very solid Committee support here” (*Investment in after-school programs*, 2003, p. 46).

Senator Specter’s efforts are typical of legislators on program-related committees, who tend to defend their programs and blame representatives of the executive branch by providing a platform to “amplify indictments prepared by others” (Derthick, 1990, p. 161). Not surprisingly, the Senate Appropriations committee rejected the President’s proposed budget cuts, recommending a \$7 million increase for the program. In the report accompanying its final appropriations bill, the committee went a step further, revising the academic orientation of the program and “urg[ing]” US DOE to “include developmental and prevention indicators...in any performance goal, objective or indicator” for the program (*Departments of Labor*, June 26, 2003, p. 240).

### Lessons for Future Advocacy

Between 1994 and 2003, the 21st CCLC program grew from a small Congressional initiative into a massive federal program and a billion-dollar industry. The polity-centered approach helps explain the causes and consequences of this tremendous shift. Changing work patterns and growing interest in positive youth development helped create broad support for afterschool during the 1990s. The congruence of philanthropic and political interests, coupled with a budget surplus, enabled President Clinton to advocate for a fivefold increase in the 21st CCLC budget. However, changes to the balance of power between Democrats and Republicans were ultimately responsible for the passage of the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 1998, which made the President’s proposal law. The polity-centered approach also explains why President Bush was unable to cut the 21st CCLC budget in 2003. A powerful afterschool movement purposefully created in the aftermath of 1998’s budgetary victory, growing congressional disillusionment with No

Child Left Behind, and the President’s waning popularity created a strong alliance between afterschool advocates and congressional leaders.

Seven years later, sweeping changes to the 21st CCLC program are being considered once again. In his FY2011 budget and blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, President Obama proposes to use the 21st CCLC program to support full-service community schools and extended school day initiatives as

well as more traditional before- and afterschool programs. In addition, he intends to federalize responsibility for administering the program, limit the role of community-based organizations, and narrow eligibility, while level-funding the initiative (Office of Management & Budget, 2010; US DOE, 2010a; US DOE, 2010b).

Many afterschool advocates oppose the President’s proposals. Without additional funding, they fear that the consolidation of afterschool, full-service community schools, and extended day initiatives will lead to deep budget cuts in afterschool. Advocates also are concerned that the President’s proposals will negatively affect existing afterschool providers and leave some communities without afterschool programs altogether (Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Policy

News, 2010; Public Witness Hearing, 2010).

Much as they did in 2003, afterschool advocates have been organizing to protect their interests (Policy News, 2010). In the end, these efforts may succeed, but advocates might do well to consider the President’s proposed changes in light of the history presented in this paper. First, they should acknowledge that the President’s emphasis on full-service community schools is consistent with Congress’ initial vision for the 21st CCLC program. Both the original House and Senate versions of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Act (S.1990, 1994a; H.R.3734, 1994b) refer explicitly to the creation of “community schools.” Similarly, funds for the 21st CCLC program could originally be used for “integrated education, health, social service, recreational, or cultural programs” (Improving America’s Schools Act, 1994). Thus, when afterschool advocates decry the President’s

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proposal for diverting funds away from afterschool, they need to remember that afterschool once diverted funds from community schools.

Advocates are right, however, to oppose the President's efforts to federalize the competition for 21st CCLC funds. In 2003, legislators were unwilling to cut the 21st CCLC program's budget, in part, because it was not in their self-interest to do so: Supporting President Bush's proposal would have reduced funding for their constituents. If enacted, President Obama's proposal to federalize the 21st CCLC competition would likely reduce advocates' power by complicating their relationship with legislators. Legislators would no longer have state earmarks to protect and could very well have few 21st CCLC grantees among their constituents. As a result, they might be far less interested in the program and unlikely to oppose further changes. Thus, supporters of the 21st CCLC program must continue to organize against this element of the President's vision.

At the same time, however, they might do well to consider a more nuanced approach to extended school day initiatives. Certainly, afterschool advocates are right to question the logic behind the President's proposal to fund extended day initiatives as part of the 21st CCLC program. The latest report on Massachusetts' heralded Extended Learning Time initiative is not too different from Mathematica's findings about the 21st CCLC program in 2003. To date, the main academic effect of Extended Learning Time in Massachusetts has been a statistically significant positive effect on fifth-grade science scores (Boulay, Robertson, Maree, & Fox, 2010).

While afterschool advocates could exploit this irony as they organize against the President's vision, they also might explore the degree to which extended day actually presents important opportunities for the afterschool field. In Providence, RI, for example, extended day is being used to integrate the city's highly successful afterschool system with the regular school day. This model seems particularly promising as it meets the needs of students, schools, and traditional afterschool providers. All Providence middle schoolers have, and soon all Providence high schoolers will have, access to high-quality afterschool programming. There are direct links between the school day and afterschool. By working to-

gether in a citywide system, afterschool providers can leverage resources as never before (Kotloff, 2010). Instead of opposing extended day completely, afterschool advocates might use this opportunity to take Providence's model to scale.

Any efforts to do so, however, must address issues of funding. In 1998, there was little outcry when President Clinton focused the 21st CCLC program on childcare rather than community schooling. In 2001, few seemed to mind increased emphasis on academic achievement instead of youth development. Yet, both changes to the 21st CCLC program were accompanied by large increases in funding. Today, afterschool advocates would do well to consider the power of public-private partnerships illustrated by the Mott Foundation's ability in 1998 to secure \$40 million worth of federal funding with a relatively small investment. In light of this history, afterschool advocates might ask philanthropic allies to use a similar strategy to ensure that President Obama's proposals do not lead to deep budget cuts among afterschool providers.

Whatever form future advocacy efforts take, they are strongest when they are rooted in a solid understanding of history. Indeed, the best way to honor the 15th anniversary of the 21st CCLC program might be to draw on the lessons of its past to enhance the future.

Today, afterschool advocates would do well to consider the power of public-private partnerships illustrated by the Mott Foundation's ability in 1998 to secure \$40 million worth of federal funding with a relatively small investment.

## 21ST CCLC UPDATE

"The Senate Appropriations Committee passed their education spending bill (S. 3686)... [in late July] with new policy language for 21st CCLC allowing State Education Agencies to sub-grant funds to Local Education Agencies for a longer school day, along with a \$100 million increase. The full House Appropriations Committee has yet to mark up their education spending bill; however, the Subcommittee increased 21st CCLC funding by \$35 million...[E]ventually a Conference Committee made of House and Senate Appropriators will meet to reconcile the differences between the two spending bills."

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[www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyFedNewsArchive.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyFedNewsArchive.cfm)*

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My research identified one peer-reviewed article (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006) addressing the 21st CCLC program. Exploring the translation of science into policy, this article provides an excellent summary of scholarly reactions, critiques, and debates, but it pays little attention to political processes or political theory.